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Election-Year Hokum with the R&D Budget

The White House science office had little of substance to announce in connection with the election-flavored economic renewal plan unveiled last month by the President. But in the ambience of an Administration that has decreed that anything goes to attain reelection, White House Science Adviser Frank Press held a news briefing designed to make very little look like a great deal.

Among some science writers attending, Press was credited with appearing embarrassed.

The highlight of the briefing, held August 28, was a printed statement, later more or less repeated by Press, that "The Administration will recommend a total of $600 million in additional budget authority for FY 1981 and 1982 to assure three per cent growth in Federal spending for basic research and to support other measures proposed."

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What was left unsaid in the statement and in Press's comments was that with the addition of the $600 million, the Administration's spending plans for research and development would still be considerably short of the figures contained in the budget that Mr. Carter submitted to Congress in January, and then severely cut in March. Mr. Carter has gone through so many desperate gyrations since then that it is difficult to sort out what he was asking for when, and how the figures compare. But it is not impossible, for the Administration, seeking maximum favorable press coverage for each disavowal of the past, usually issues memos for the news media, and it is through these Administration documents that it is possible to track the various statements of intention.

Thus, in accompaniment to March revisions of the January budget, the White House science office issued a 16-page document, "Research and Development: Revisions to the Fiscal Year 1981 Budget," that stated, "Overall, the Fiscal Year 1980 budget is reduced by $355M, or approximately 1.1 per cent, while the 1981 budget is reduced by $1.054B, or approximately 2.9 per cent. This preserves an increase of nearly $3.5B for research and development between Fiscal Years 1980 and 1981, a growth of over 11 per cent."

When Press, at the news conference, was asked whether the announced $600 million merely amounted to putting back some of the money that the Administration had sliced out in March, he reluctantly conceded that to be the case, but stressed that the March cuts were forced by a need to demonstrate determination against inflation-promoting deficits.

As for what will be done with the purported increase of $600 million over two years, the statement distributed by Press said, "The programmatic details will be announced as part of the President's 1982 budget. In the interim, the Administration will consult with scientists and engineers in universities and elsewhere to refine the details of these programs."

Press volunteered, however, that some of the money would be used to finance academic-industrial R&D collaboration, plus so-called generic technology centers, to investigate industry-wide subjects, such as corrosion, catalysis, and biotechnology; in addition, the funds would be used to ensure "real" financial growth for basic research.

All of these items were announced in January, when Press held a news briefing on the Fiscal 1981 budget.

Since Carter and his reelection-obsessed henchmen

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In Brief

Rep. Henry Waxman's Health Research Act, requiring Congressional reauthorization of all of NIH every three years, passed the House easily—292-48—on August 28, despite a nationwide lobbying campaign by medical schools and research organizations. In the process, the House mandated $16 million for spinal cord regeneration research, directed an expansion of research on Reye's Syndrome, and also ordered NIH to make a study of the controversial drug DMSO.

The US and Western Europe spent over $21 billion on military research and development in 1978, according to the latest edition of World Military and Social Expenditures, *a privately published, authoritative annual. (Available for $3.50 per copy from: World Priorities, Box 1003, Leesburg, Va. 22075.)*

William J. Perry, chief of research for the Defense Department, arrived in China September 6 for a two-week tour of "research and development, test and evaluation facilities." Perry, heading a 22-member delegation, said the purpose of the visit—an unusually long one for such a high-ranking official—"is to broaden contact between the defense establishments of the two countries."

R&D Money Bills Progressing in Congress

Apart from some hiccups over funding for basic research in the Department of Energy, appropriations for science have so far been proceeding relatively smoothly through Congress.

There could still be some problems in store, since the exact total and distribution of the overall budget for fiscal 1981—which begins October 1—have yet to be agreed in conference between the two legislative bodies.

And last week the Senate appropriations committee proposed, as the House has already agreed, a 2 per cent across-the-board cut in the appropriations bill covering agencies such as the National Science Foundation and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. The exact distribution of cuts, not to exceed 5 per cent for any one agency, would be left to the Office of Management and Budget.

But except for these potential restraints, and some of the inevitable skirmishing, there has been little significant change to the general shape of the revised budget package prepared by the Administration in March. Indeed, with general acceptance of a likely budget deficit of between $20 and $30 billion, and no pretence left of any attempt at a balanced budget, Congressional actions may themselves go some of the way towards restoring the 3 per cent real growth for basic research which President Carter promised to secure through supplemental funding in his "economic revitalization" message two weeks ago.

The House, for example, has already passed an appropriations bill for the Department of Health and Human Services which proposes a budget of $3.6 billion for the National Institutes of Health, a 5.6-per-cent increase over the current year, compared to the 2-per-cent increase proposed by the Administration. (Of the extra money recommended by the House, $36 million would go for support of training grants, which the Administration wanted to cut back in favor of stabilizing the number of investigator-initiated research grants.)

DOE's physics budget, following many howls from the high-energy community, got a boost in the Senate that put it slightly above the figure in the President's revised spending plans. The outcome, however, remains in doubt, since the House appropriations bill contains a lower amount.

Typical of the relatively even keel is the budget of the National Science Foundation. Both legislative bodies have sought some redistribution of funds, perhaps the most significant being the Senate's authorization of a major new "women in science" component to the Foundation's programs, promoted by Senator Edward Kennedy's Labor and Human Resources Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research.

Overall, however, the recommended level of funding for the Foundation has been close to the $1.074 billion in the President's revised request. This is less than the $1.148 billion which Mr. Carter proposed in January, but still represents an 8-per-cent increase over the current year.

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PRESS *(Continued from Page 1)*

have not hesitated to throw Defense Secretary Brown and Secretary of State Muskie into the election campaign, it would be egregiously naive to assume restraint concerning the White House science office. The deployment, however, need not be blatant, nor has it been. With John Anderson's strength concentrated in academe and other bastions of America's new PhD proletariat, the Administration need only show that it cares, which is easily done by consulting "with scientists and engineers in universities and elsewhere to refine the details of these programs."

Having reaped points in January for proposing a big boost in research and development spending, Carter sought credit in March as an anti-inflationist by cutting it back. In August, he returned to the January quest for credit by putting back some of the springtime cuts.

Anyone who doubts the public-relations effectiveness of these squalid gyrations is referred to the September 12 *Science,* where the August economic plan is described under a headline that reads: "Carter Plan: Dividend for R&D."—DSG

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. . .Proxmire Fails at Big Cut in NSF Funds

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The House passed its version of the NSF appropriations bill at the end of July, as part of the general bill covering funds for the Department of Housing and Urban Development and other independent agencies. In doing so, it approved a redistribution of funds within the NSF total, taking $2 million from the scientific, technological and international affairs (STIA) program, $2 million from program development and management, $1 million from US/USSR co-operative research, and $5 million from applied research. It also directed that the $10 million saved should be added to the budget for science education. And apart from the 2-per-cent across-the-board cut—the result of a floor amendment from Rep. Clarence Miller (R-Ohio)—NSF officials point out that the Foundation was the only major federal agency or department covered by the appropriations bill to have its full funding request approved.

So far, the story has been the same in the Senate. Senator William Proxmire, chairman of the HUD/Independent Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, failed in an attempt to reduce the NSF total by $22 million. And the full Appropriations Committee last week approved a bill which would give the NSF a budget of $1.079 billion, slightly above the Administration's request.

The Senate committee proposed an additional $5 million for science education, an area in which the March budget review came up with recommendations for some significant cutbacks. But it only agreed to half of the House's cuts, leaving the applied science budget request intact; and the Senate also agreed to add $5.1 million to cover the additional fuel costs of the Foundation's oceanographic fleet and its Antarctic programs, for which a $10 million supplemental request is expected from the Administration.

While the appropriations bills were being acted upon, procedural disputes held up an action in the House on the authorization bill from mid-June until last week. The results, as Rep. George E. Brown Jr. (D-Cal), Chairman of the House Science, Research, and Technology Subcommittee, put it, was that "very little of what we do with regard to the actual passage of this bill will have an impact upon the actual dollars spent next year."

However, this did not prevent the House from agreeing to authorize a total of $1.126 billion for the Foundation. This figure, Brown pointed out, is likely to approximate the result of adding to the final appropriations bill that part of the extra $300 million promised by President Carter for basic science which is likely to find its way to NSF programs (and which would bring the

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Bearing Down on NSF

The following selections are from the House debate, September 5, on the 1981 NSF authorization.

Rep. John M. Ashbrook (R-Ohio): . . . the NSF, in March of 1979, spent $30,759 for a book on women scientists in the United States from 1830 to 1980. The Library of Congress found no less than 82 books and articles on this subject dating back to 1970 . . . After reviewing some of the NSF grants to academia, I could not help but wonder how Madison and Hamilton and Jay ever completed the Federalist Papers without a Federal subsidy . . . Even Marx and Engels, who launched the greatest revolutionary movement of our time, did so without government money. . .

Rep. Trent Lott (R-Miss.): . . . I think that we still have to keep the pressure on so that some of these ridiculous programs we have heard about in the past do not continue to be funded where money is wasted on personal items not really dealing with the behavioral sciences. I think a minimum cut here that (Ashbrook) has offered with his amendment is in order. It helps to keep emphasis on the problem. . .

Rep. George E. Brown Jr. (D-Calif): I am happy to say that there has been substantial improvement in the quality of the granting process and the quality of the research in these areas that have been subjected to scrutiny by (Ashbrook) . . . I think he knows as we know that in the social and behavioral sciences we are not so far advanced as we are in some of the so-called hard sciences. They require closer scrutiny and I think a closer direction to make sure that we are actually improving the quality of this science. . .

Rep. Lott: . . . I think that a minimal reduction . . . would encourage the NSF to see that the people's money is not spent for such things as luggage and typewriters . . . I think NSF has been improving. I think we need to keep the pressure on. . .

Rep. Brown: Our competitors in Japan have, as they have in connection with our technological developments in many other areas, made very widespread use of our social-science research in the fields of worker productivity, motivation, and other research of that sort. In considerable degree, their success in doing a better job in productivity than we have is due to the fact that they use our published research and put it into practice in their industrial system, whereas we tend to disregard it. That is regrettable. I think this focus on social-science research may help us to correct that shortcoming.

(The authorization bill passed, 314-55.)

Reagan Disavows Astrology, Fortune Telling

The presidential election campaign has produced some partisan stirrings within the scientific community. But so far, there's no sign of the big mobilizations—mainly on the Democratic side—that have characterized recent past campaigns. This suggests, perhaps, that scientists, engineers, and associated professionals are as depressed as the rest of the population when they consider the three major presidential candidates.

The sharpest piece of scientist-related action came last month when the Federation of American Scientists—a vintage anti-Reagan outfit—got up a bunch of Nobel laureates, plus a few lesser eminences, to query the Republican candidate on his attitudes toward astrology and fortune telling. (Those signing were: Nobelists Julius Axelrod, Owen Chamberlain, Robert Holley, Salvador Luria, and Burton Richter; they were joined by Herman Feshbach, President of the American Physical Society, and George B. Kistiakowsky, who was Eisenhower's Science Advisor.)

Describing themselves as "gravely disturbed at a newspaper report . . . indicating that . . . Reagan . . . believes in astrology, and in fortune telling. . ." the scientists added that "no person whose decisions are based, even in part, on such evident fantasies can be trusted to make the many serious—and even life-and-death—decisions required of American Presidents."

What's disturbing and revealing about Reagan—more so that the alleged interest in the occult—is that he

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BUDGET *(Continued from Page 3)*

total roughly back to the earlier January request).

Budget time brought the usual assault on the Foundation's social sciences programs by Rep. John Ashbrook (R-Ohio), who sought to reduce the authorization for NSF's biological, behavioral and social sciences directorate to this year's level of $172 million—a cut of about $10 million.

Brown, however, worried that the Ashbrook amendment might find relatively wide support, went so far as to admit that "in the social and behavioral sciences we are not as far advanced as we are in some of the so-called hard sciences. They require greater scrutiny and I think a closer direction to make sure that we are actually improving the quality of this science."

Whatever the appropriateness of his comments, Brown backed them up with the recommendation that $4.1 million be cut from the directorate's budget request—in place of the $10 million proposed by Ashbrook—and that this money be transferred to meeting the Foundation's extra fuel costs. The amendment was accepted both by Ashbrook and by the full House, and the bill passed through with no further delay.

Who's Better for Science?

Is there a relationship between the ups and downs of federal funds for research and development and the political party that occupies the White House? Figure it out for yourself from these figures that SGR has assembled from NSF reports. But keep in mind that it takes a newly installed president about a year and a half to put his own stamp on the budget, and then, of course, Congress will have its say. (SGR welcomes reports of important but inconspicuous patterns.)

[Dollars in millions]

	Current dollars	Constant 1972 dollars
1953	2,753	4,643
1960	8,738	12,681
1961	9,250	13,292
1962	9,911	14,400
1963	11,204	15,589
1964	12,536	17,174
1965	13,012	17,457
1966	13,969	18,183
1967	14,395	18,182
1968	14,927	18,103
1969	14,895	17,221
1970	14,668	16,090
1971	14,892	15,540
1972	15,755	15,755
1973	16,309	15,513
1974	16,754	14,647
1975	18,152	14,417
1976	19,844	14,865
1977	21,751	15,314
1978	24,058	15,822
1979 (prelim)	26,762	16,185
1980 (est.)	29,400	16,215

Senate Issues DNA Hearings

Available without charge: the text of Senate hearings held last May on *Industrial Applications of Recombinant DNA Techniques.* Requests, using that title, should be sent to: Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Subcommittee on Science, Technology, and Space, US Senate, Washington, DC 20510. Enclose a self-addressed mailing label.

. . .Says They'll Not Influence Decisions

(Continued from Page 4)

was foolish enough to respond directly to a gambit designed to make him look like an idiot. Instead of having a campaign flunky tell the mischievous inquirers that the issue is too silly to warrant a reply from the presidential candidate, Reagan himself wrote back, or at least signed, a letter that stated, in part:

"Let me assure you that while Nancy and I enjoy glancing at the daily astrology charts in our morning newspaper (when we are at home, which isn't too often these days), we do not plan our daily activities or our lives around them." To which he added, "I can honestly tell you they have never played a part in decisions I have to make nor will they."

On the basis of this performance, it may be time for the opposition to raise the charge that Ronald Reagan used to be a thespian.

Meanwhile, the Republicans have taken the lead in setting up one of the standard fixtures of contemporary presidential campaigning—an advisory committee on health policy, featuring big-to-middling names from academe, industry, and other sectors of the health business (see box). According to an announcement from the Reagan Bush Committee, the Health Policy Advisory Committee is supposed "to examine national health-care programs and to make recommendations for a national health policy." Among the bigger catches on this group are two former assistant secretaries of health in the old Department of Health, Education, and Welfare: Charles C. Edwards, who was head of the Food and Drug Administration when Nixon appointed him to the HEW post in 1973, and his successor two years later, Theodore C. Cooper, who also held the post for two years.

Finally, we erred when we stated in the last issue that the major candidates had not yet signed up any scientific or engineering advisory recruits. Serving as Reagan's "energy counselor" is John J. McKetta, professor of chemical engineering, University of Texas, Austin—as was reported last month in *Engineering Times,* published by the National Society of Professional Engineers.

GOP Health Committee

Rita Ricardo Campbell, Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution.

James H. Cavanaugh, Senior Vice President for Science and Planning, Allergan, Irvine, California; former Deputy Chief of Staff, The White House; Deputy Director of the Domestic Council and Deputy Assistant Secretary of HEW.

Theodore Cooper, Dean, Cornell University College and Provost for Medical Affairs, Cornell University, New York; former Assistant Secretary, HEW

Charles C. Edwards, President, Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation, LaJolla, California; former Assistant Secretary of Health, HEW, and former Commissioner, FDA.

Isaac Ehrlich, Professor of Economics, State University of New York, Buffalo.

Alain C. Enthoven, Professor of Public and Private Management, Graduate School of Business, Stanford University.

William C. Felch, Former Chairman, Legislative Council, American Medical Association, Rye, New York.

Clark C. Havighurst, Professor of Law, Duke University; former Professor of Community Health Sciences, Duke University Medical School.

Helen M. Jameson, Assistant Administrator, Rochester Methodist Hospital, Rochester, Minnesota.

Cotton M. Lindsay, Visiting Professor of Economics, Emory University, Atlanta.

Wade Mountz, President, Norton-Children's Hospitals, Louisville, Kentucky; former Chairman, Legislative Council, American Hospital Association.

Mary Munson Runge, Chairman of the Board, American Pharmaceutical Association, Oakland, California.

Lee R. Shelton, Director of Health Services, Health 1st, Atlanta, Georgia; former member, National Advisory Committee on Drugs, FDA.

Robert B. Shira, Senior Vice President and Acting Provost, Tufts University; Dean Emeritus, Tufts University School of Dental Medicine; former President, American Dental Association.

C. Joseph Stetler, former President, Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association.

William B. Walsh, Chairman, President and Medical Director, The People-to-People Health Foundation, Inc. (Project HOPE), Millwood, Virginia.

HHS Appoints Health Deputy

Alonzo S. Yerby, Professor of Health Services Administration at the Harvard School of Public Health, has been appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health at the Department of Health and Human Services. Yerby will be in charge of coordinating federal health programs with state and local authorities and will be chief adviser in this area to Julius Richmond, Assistant Secretary for Health and Surgeon General.

College Enrollments at Peak

Higher-education enrollments are expected to hit an all-time high of 11.7 million in the 1980-81 academic year—up 1.1 percent from last fall, according to the Department of Education. But next year will bring the beginning of a long downturn, as slumping high school enrollments make their mark on college admissions. The high school population peaked in 1976, and from 1978 to 1979 experienced a drop of 2.8 per cent, for a total enrollment of 15.3 million. The figures were compiled by the department's National Center for Education Statistics.

White House Science Office Assailed by GAO

The General Accounting Office (GAO) says that the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) is functioning as a short-order job shop for the White House and is ignoring the longrange functions mandated by Congress. And the chief of OSTP, presidential Science Advisor Frank Press, has politely replied that GAO doesn't know what it's talking about.

The divergence of opinion is contained in a new GAO report, "The Office of Science and Technology Policy: Adaptation to President's Operating Style May Conflict With Congressionally Mandated Assignments."

The report, based on a study ordered by Senator Adlai E. Stevenson, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Science, Technology, and Space, is the latest manifestation of discord between the White House Science Office and the Congressional committees that restored it to life after its abolition by Richard Nixon. When they did so, late in the Ford Administration, they legislated a design intended to give Congress close surveillance of executive science-policymaking by requiring OSTP to issue an annual report as well as a five-year "outlook." In addition, Congress said OSTP should be equipped with a council of scientists, on the model of the President's Science Advisory Committee, long a centerpiece of the office that Nixon wiped out.

When Carter came to office, there was uncertainty as to whether he'd keep OSTP. After some initial doubts, he decided he would—but in a scaled-down version. By Executive Order, the council was eliminated, and the reports were assigned to the National Science Foundation. Thus, the Congressional quest for authoritative insights into the Administration's thoughts and plans concerning R&D was unilaterally thwarted. Congress, of course, can block an Executive Order concerning reorganization but rarely does so when the issue concerns the President's staff arrangements.

Following are some of the major findings of the GAO report:

●

OSTP believes that it is not feasible to do more comprehensive strategic planning in its environment and remain effective in the Executive Office of the President. The principal reasons it gives are that the Executive Office of the President is not set up to deal with such comprehensive work, OSTP views science and technology primarily as components that contribute to the achievement of mission goals, and OSTP does not have sufficient resources. Thus, OSTP does little to study holistic interactions among discrete strategies. Additionally, OSTP gives lower priority to issues intrinsic to the governance and support of science and technology.

We found, further, that OSTP has no systematic and formal mechanism for identifying long-range emerging issues or providing a detached perspective when screening outside proposals for its agenda.

We agree that many constraints in the entire Executive Office of the President inhibit OSTP's further involvement in comprehensive strategic planning. We agree with OSTP that it would not be as influential as it is if it devoted most of its resources to comprehensive studies. We believe, however, that OSTP gains its influence in the policy process by providing technical expertise in mission areas but also by offering a broad perspective on science and technology as a whole. Therefore, even if OSTP cannot do comprehensive studies, its selection of issues must reflect its broad understanding of how issues relate to each other and what they may mean for the future.

We are concerned that OSTP has no systematic process for identifying, assessing, and ranking issues. We do not agree with OSTP that it is sufficient to run an open office

(Continued on Page 7)

The following excerpts are from OSTP Director Frank Press's response to the GAO report concerning his office:

●

. . .We believe that OSTP has been effective in achieving the Congressional purpose. Of course, in order to be effective, our mode of operation must be consistent with, and complimentary to, the policies and operating styles of the President and those with whom we work on a day-to-day basis. We have sought to work as an essential component of the White House. But I hardly see this fact as a constraint; I believe that our efforts to be an effective participant in the policy deliberations of the Executive Office are fully consistent with and supportive of the Congressional intent. . .

In response to the view expressed in the report that OSTP should establish a formal mechanism to provide a detailed review of issues for its agenda. To some extent, of course, our agenda is determined by events and by the interests of the President, of other parts of the Executive Office, of the Departments and agencies, and of the Congress. And with regard to agenda items that we might initiate, we continue to make efforts to assure that we obtain the benefit of the views of outsiders to an extent perhaps not appreciated by your staff. I have consciously hesitated to establish a more formal mechanism because of the need for confidentiality at critical junctures in the policy process, and because no one group is likely to have the breadth of view to encompass the ever increasing span of science and technology. Thus I believe in a more selective process in which we consult experts with relevant expertise in the areas of concern.

Senate May Act on NSF Post

There was optimism last week that Senate Republicans would not stand in the way of John B. Slaughter's confirmation for the directorship of the National Science Foundation.

While nothing has been formally agreed to, Republicans on the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee said that Slaughter would probably be exempted from their party stand against fixed-term presidential appoints so close to election day (SGR Vol. X, No. 14).

The appointment was approved by the Democratic majority on the committee through the use of a "rolling quorum"—a legally questionable procedure through which Senators are considered present even if they've left the hearing room.

As things now stand, Slaughter's nomination will be returned to the Committee for consideration by members of both parties, and there's a possibility that it will come to the floor of the Senate sometime soon after September 15.

According to one Senate source, the Republicans have advised their Democratic colleagues that the Foundation directorship—generally considered a non-political post—is one of the very few appointments that they'll cooperate with prior to election day.

OSTP *(Continued from Page 6)*

that entertains outside suggestions for OSTP work. We believe that OSTP should establish some formal mechanism for obtaining a detached view of issues for its agenda. The mechanism should help OSTP identify emerging issues, screen the many external suggestions for OSTP work, examine interrelationships, and suggest priorities that can be subjected to the professional judgement of the OSTP staff with regard to importance, timeliness, and feasibility.

We recognize OSTP's difficulty in taking public responsibility for the Annual Report and the Five-Year Outlook. Resource constraints and the concern not to disclose the Administration's problems and strategies prematurely could cause OSTP to screen information and limit its communications to the Congress. However, the Director of OSTP is the principal spokesperson for the Administration's views on science and technology. Therefore, even though the Director of NSF has formal responsibility for preparing the Annual Report and the Five-Year Outlook, the Director of OSTP will be perceived as responsible for the report contents and posture.

Copies of the report are available from: Superintendent of Documents, USGPO, Washington, DC 20402; tel. (202) 783-3238. Order by title and identification code PAD-80-79.

In Print

National Patterns of Science and Technology Resources 1980, first of a new series of NSF statistical reports that aim to integrate a wide variety of data on sources and uses of R&D support. (A summary was presented in SGR Vol. X, No. 13.) The full report (73 pages), is available for $3.75 per copy from: Superintendent of Documents, USGPO, Washington, DC 20402; request Stock No. 038-000-00448-4.

1980 NIH Almanac, lots of detail — budgets, people, programs — on the National Institutes of Health, from the early history of what's now the Public Health Service to the founding of the first part of NIH, the National Cancer Institute, and on to the present: 203 pages, available without charge, from: Division of Public Information, National Institutes of Health, Building 1, Room 309, Bethesda, Md. 20205.

Antitrust, Uncertainty, and Technological Innovation and *The International Technology Transfer Process,* pamphlet-size odds and ends collected from workshops held at least two years ago under the auspices of the fast-stepping National Academy of Sciences; stale stuff, but relevant in view of the "reindustrialization" fad now sweeping Washington. Available without charge from: Office of the Foreign Secretary, National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Ave. Nw., Washington, DC 20418.

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Shame on Battelle for "Random" Survey

Something other than mere chance recently brought to SGR Editor Greenberg an opinion questionnaire from the Battelle Human Affairs Research Centers, Seattle, part of the sprawling Battelle Memorial Institute. And from it arose, though it wasn't intended, sympathy for that folk instinct that, to the chagrin of the opinion-survey trade, has led to a national epidemic of non-cooperation among survey subjects.

The questionnaire, dealing with "public opinion regarding issues associated with radioactive nuclear waste management," was accompanied by a letter stating "you were chosen to be a survey participant by a scientific random process." The letter then referred to a number on the questionnaire and stated, "The purpose of that number is to enable us to know which survey participants have returned their questionnaires and which need a reminder. All of the information you give us in response to our questionnaire will of course be kept strictly confidential." It was also stated that Battelle organization is conducting the survey for the US Department of Energy; recipients with questions were invited to telephone Battelle, collect.

Curious about various matters, I telephoned and was connected to a researcher associated with the project.

After identifying myself, I asked, "How did I get picked?" He answered that those chosen to receive questionnaires—a bit over 2000 persons in all—were picked from three groups: (1) inhabitants of large cities in six separate regions of the country; (2) persons who live close to hazardous facilities, such as nuclear plants and liquid natural-gas storage sites, and (3) members of six groups that have taken pro or con positions on nuclear issues, plus the National Association of Science writers.

The Battelle man guessed that my membership in the Association accounted for my selection.

"That's not a 'random process,' then, as the letter says it is," I told the Battelle man.

"Not exactly," he agreed, "but within each group the selections were random."

"Is the identifying number for any purpose other than jogging non-respondents?" I asked.

"No," he answered.

"Isn't it also used to determine which group a respondent is in?"

"Oh," he replied, "it's used for that, too."

"For anything else?"

"Absolutely not."

Not noted on the covering letter or elsewhere in connection with the questionnaire is that Battelle is a major nuclear-waste management contractor for the Department of Energy. DOE is paying about $35,000 for the survey, plus another $35,000 for a slightly different companion survey.

Failure to return the questionnaire within a week brought a letter urging cooperation. "It is very important that you fill out this questionnaire because you were chosen to be a survey participant by a scientific random process. As a result, your views represent the opinions of many persons who were not chosen."

I'd answer, Battelle, if the questionnaire permitted me to explain that what's fearsome about nuclear-waste management is that at least part of it is in the hands of the sort of clods who wrote that questionnaire. I'm sure that opinion would be shared by many persons who were not chosen.—DSG

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